

Recommendations/Goals

In summary, current safety programs have resulted in a significant reduction in highway-rail crossing accidents and fatalities. In 1993, 626 people died as a result of accidents at highway-rail crossings; this is half the number of annual fatalities 20 years ago. This has occurred despite increases in rail traffic over the same period.

The development and expansion of high speed rail service on existing railroad rights-of-way will further increase the potential for, and severity of, collisions at highway-rail crossings unless mitigating steps are taken. The Department is committed to continuing the trend of reducing these collisions. Improvement funding is available under ISTEA and additional funding will be available under our high speed rail legislative proposal. We are also undertaking a program of research, development and demonstration of next generation grade crossing safety systems designed to ensure absolute protection at high speed crossings which are not closed.

This Action Plan identifies a wide variety of initiatives, beginning with efforts to reach and involve the law enforcement community. Further research is called for. Incentive programs are suggested. Special provisions are urged for the National Highway System and for the Principal Railroad Lines. Finally, a revenue neutral funding plan is proposed which could make these initiatives possible.

Only through partnership can we hope to progress these initiatives. The Department, along with the FHWA, FTA, NHTSA and FRA, the United States Congress, the railroad and transit industries, states and associations, and Operation Lifesaver, working together, can advance these recommendations and can achieve the goal.

A. Recommendations

To assure that the downward trend in crossing accidents and fatalities continues, we must work together to:

1. Establish an expanded and pro-active outreach program to our Nation's traffic law enforcement community ranging from patrol officers to judges.
2. Reduce the number of traffic law and warning device violations at highway-rail crossings by increasing enforcement and judicial support.

3. Promote comprehensive and systematic corridor reviews of highway-rail crossings, especially those over our nation's Principal Railroad Lines (PRLs).
4. Eliminate little used and redundant crossings within corridors where alternatives exist, especially those on the National Highway System (NHS).
5. Upgrade signs and signals at all crossings, taking full advantage of available state-of-the-art technologies.
6. Increase public awareness of 1) hazards at crossings and, 2) motorist responsibilities at crossings.
7. Develop and provide national, minimum safety standards for private crossings.
8. Eliminate the impediment to high speed rail operations posed by private crossings.
9. Enhance the effectiveness of our resources through research and data analysis.
10. Promote research and champion plausible innovation.
11. Insure that timely and accurate information needed by decision makers is available.
12. Raise public and police awareness of the unlawfulness of, and dangers inherent in trespassing on railroad rights-of-way.
13. Develop and make available sufficiently detailed information to prepare and focus trespass prevention campaigns.

Only if we all move forward together with these Initiatives can the Nation enjoy a balanced transportation system. Only if we move forward can we end the loss of life, health and property at highway-rail crossings.

B. Goal

We must continue the downward trend in accident and casualty trends. If current programs are continued and these recommendations are implemented, a reduction by at least 50 percent or more is possible in the decade ahead, i.e., by 2004.